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ABSTRACT

The first American Library Association convention west of the Mississippi, held in 1891 in San Francisco, generated an interest in forming a California association. Then in 1895 a meeting of representatives of eight northern California libraries was called, and the California Library Association (CLA) was born. The five main areas of concern to the early CLA were the development of traveling libraries and interlibrary loan within the state, the need for a state library training school in California, and the need for additional copyright depositories including one in California. Meetings held during the first decade covered those subjects as well as book selection, the ideal librarian, women serving in public libraries, book publishing and selling in California, and children's literature. (Author/LS)

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The California Library Association, 1895-1906; Years of Experimentation and Growth

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The American Library Association, organized almost one hundred years ago, did not hold an annual convention west of the Mississippi until 1891; San Francisco was the scene of that meeting. Those librarians coming from the Establishment East felt California a rather wild and wooly place; many saw their job here as one of "missionary," bringing the good news to their deprived (and somewhat depraved) brethren in the Far West.

The general state of California's libraries brought praise from those attending the 1891 conference, even though library organization in California before 1890 was largely at the local level, and librarians were seen as mere custodians. Leadership was vested in local library societies or city library boards, but no regional or state organization existed. The beginnings of a state-wide library movement can not be tied down to a particular year or event, but the 1891 ALA conference must be seen as one prime event in the movement. Even with this meeting, however, and subsequent national conventions in Portland, Pasadena, and Berkeley, ALA maintained its eastern orientation. California librarians recognized the need, due to geography more than anything else, for a state organization of libraries and librarians.

Even though most people remember that the CLA was organized in 1895 as The Library Association of Central California, it was foreshadowed by a library club formed in Los Angeles in 1891 under the leadership of Tessa Kelso, librarian at Los Angeles Public Library.

The South California Library Club had thirty-five charter members, and its meetings were devoted not only to a discussion of library topics, but also aspects of art and literature. When Ms. Kelso and her assistant, Adelaide Hasse, were pressured to resign because of a "selection error"--they had allowed an "improper" French novel to be purchased for the library--Kelso moved from the state, and the library club became inactive.[1]

By 1895 librarians in the San Francisco Bay Area were considering an association of libraries. Arthur Jellison, of the Mechanics' Institute Library, George Clark, of the San Francisco Public Library, and Joseph Rowell, Librarian at the University of California, sent a joint letter to Bay Area librarians calling for a meeting to consider an association. The first meeting, representing eight libraries, was held February 22, 1895; by the March meeting, a constitution had been written and officers elected. Rowell was made President, and CLA was on its way, with its object: ". . .to promote the welfare of libraries, and bring them into closer relations with the public."[2]

CLA held many of its meetings during the first ten years in Bay Area libraries, but the Association did grow bold and journey farther afield for some of its conferences. Dedication of a new library building was often the scene of a CLA monthly meeting. When the Hazelton Library Building was being dedicated in Stockton, a delegation from San Francisco began the journey up the Delta the evening before the meeting on the river boat T. C. Walker. We have no record of what transpired aboard the river boat during the night as the delegation

made its way to Stockton, but knowing the circumspect nature of librarians, most of the evening was probably devoted to an informal--but stimulating--discussion of the cataloging of incunabula, and all of its ramifications.[3]

Joseph Rowell, Librarian at Berkeley and one of the 1895 founders, was a prime-mover through the first decade and beyond. Noted for his dedication and wry humor, the CLA perhaps owes more to Rowell than to any other person for its continued success during those first years.

In a CLA paper presented in 1896, Rowell gives his extended definition of the "ideal librarian," part of which reads:

> "The ideal librarian is a person of stern integrity, whose word is equal to another man's bond. He has high impulse, energy, earnestness, and a confidence in himself based on training and on the experience of others. He doesn't dream of his bank account; he is unselfishly devoted to his work. While not a genius, his enthusiasm takes the place of great talent. He sometimes errs, and feels badly; for with zeal always goes a thin skin, but takes comfort from the thought that great progress is seldom gained without occasional retrogression.
>
> He advertises his library and its noteworthy accessions and keeps, not himself, but the library constantly in public view. To this end he scorns not the use of puffs in the newspapers, and when public attention is directed to his stock and people visit him, they always find what they are in search of, and depart amply informed, and return again as often as occasion arises.[4]

Throughout his discourse Rowell appears to have been describing, of course, the male librarian. California's tradition of social libraries with male librarians meant only that the employment of women as librarians was slightly delayed in California; besides, to residents of the late nineteenth century, librarian positions were particularly

well-suited to women because of the nature of the work, their low pay and prestige.

The CLA was not unaware of this phenomena and devoted the whole of one of its monthly meetings to the role of "woman in the service of the public library." The program included a paper by Celia Hayward of San Francisco Public Library, in which she observes that good temper and good health are essential factors in becoming a good cataloger; and

> as few women are addicted to the use of strong drink and the deadly cigarette, and as they are coming to dare to take responsible exercise, and as they have grown sensible enough not to be ashamed of robust health but find it rather something to be proud of, woman now stand side by side with men, if not above them, in this particular of health.[5]

The topics discussed at meetings of the early CLA were so wide-ranging they defy simple categorization. One notable meeting in November 1895 was devoted to "book publishing and bookselling in California," and included papers by Charles Murdock, William Doxey, A. M. Robertson, and J. S. Hutchings. California printing and publishing historians can only wish copies of papers read that day had survived.[6]

There were five general areas, however, in which the early CLA seems to have fixed its focus, not only with papers read at meetings, but also through actions taken state-wide in shaping library policy. These were: (1) the development of traveling libraries and inter-library loan within California, (2) the need for a state library commission, (3) the development of library selection policies, (4) the need for a library training school in California, and (5) the need for additional copyright depositories, including one in California.

In the late 1890s a chief goal of the CLA was to organize a state agency to promote traveling libraries, a way of reaching those readers still unserved by any local public libraries. Traveling libraries had already been established in several Eastern states, and since 1890 Wells, Fargo & Co. had been circulating books and periodicals to its agents in the Pacific States. At a meeting in September 1898, a call was made for a two-day conference in Sacramento--the first general library conference in California's history--to consider some system for traveling libraries and interlibrary loan.[7] However, even after the general library conference and further discussions in early 1899, no action was taken. It was the California Woman's Club of San Francisco that started the first traveling library in late 1899; it was followed by the Tuesday Club of Sacramento. By 1900 many California women's clubs were adopting traveling libraries as service activities.

A statewide plan of traveling libraries was not possible before 1903, when the State Library obtained approval to loan books outside its walls. Fifty books would be loaned for three months to communities throughout the state; after three months, the collection of fifty could be exchanged for another.

By 1911, with the establishment of municipal libraries, and the beginning of county library systems, traveling libraries were no longer necessary. The three-month collections were then used for the "large loan" collections made available by the State Library to the new county libraries.[8] Thus the system of traveling libraries which was begun in California under private auspices; was given discussion,

elaboration, and encouragement by the CLA; was the immediate ancestor of the substantial county library systems found in California today.

One segment of the liberal library law passed in 1901 by the California State Legislature authorized interlibrary loan. The idea of interlibrary loan had been discussed at a CLA meeting in May 1895, and the October meeting of the same year was devoted to the topic of "library specialization and co-operation." The resolution proposed at that meeting called for librarians throughout the State to present to the trustees and directors of their local libraries the desirability and mutual advantage of interlibrary loan; the resolution was unanimously adopted and can be accurately called the beginning of interlibrary loan in California. The initial response to the plan was discouraging, but the trend was clear. When the University of California approved loan of library materials to other academic libraries in 1898, it was only a matter of time before non-academic libraries followed the lead. The move toward interlibrary loan was then made official for public libraries in the 1901 act, and the law remained virtually unchanged for eight years.[9]

Since the CLA was not an official governmental agency, it was only partially successful in directing the growth of California's libraries; the need for a state library commission was felt early and efforts toward organizing such a commission were actively made by the CLA.

A library commission would not only promote and advise libraries which already existed, but also extend services to the unserved public.

The traveling libraries advocated by the CLA attempted to provide part of that additional service. In other ways as well, the CLA was performing services, perhaps unwittingly, which in other states, were being conducted by state library commissions. Until such a commission became a reality in California, however, the CLA was there to fill the need for library promotion and directed growth.

Not until 1905 did the California State Library officially assume responsibility for extension and promotion, and the CLA was gradually relieved of this direct duty, although obviously the Association has never lost its advisory and lobbying capacity in library affairs.[10]

Many CLA discussions during the first ten years involved book selection, especially for public libraries. The fourth meeting of the CLA was devoted to "fiction in libraries," and the consensus seems to have been "that while fiction-reading, and particularly the 'trashy' kind, was open to grave criticism, its effect was on the whole beneficial, as it nearly always led to the reading of a better class of literature." As Edwin Woodruff observed in his paper that day,

> it may well be asked if much of the prejudice against fiction, is not an inherited relic from our Puritanic great-grandparents, to whom story-books were silly and wicked and who found the imaginative side of <u>their</u> natures fully terrified and satisfied with a blazing description of 'the other place' which, in a two-hour sermon, some local Jonathan Edwards could pave with the incandescent skulls of unbaptised infants.[11]

But, in another address a year later, Clement Young of Lowell High School in San Francisco, observed that when it comes to reading material for children and young adults

> there is no fallacy so pernicious as that which assumes that a child must pass through a certain stage of reading trash in order that he may acquire that appetite for reading which will cause him to assimilate more nutritive pabulum; in short, that he must know the bad in order to choose the good.[12]

Perhaps part of the concern of librarians was (and is) that library users would actually prefer and enjoy the "bad" over the librarian's conception of what was "good" for them.

The CLA first debated the need for formal training in "library economy" in April 1897 by asking the question: "should a library school be organized and conducted under the auspices of the San Francisco Public Library?" As Arthur Jellison notes in the records for the debate,

> the question was considered carefully from both sides, but the negative was presented so logically and with such vigor that it won with ease. The argument made was that while careful and specific training is invaluable in the librarian, this training should be in the direction of a general culture, a close study of library economy in the broadest sense, and a thorough knowledge of languages, rather than technical details so easily learned in the practical library life.[13]

College was the place for such training.

There were further discussions and a short-lived attempt at library training during the 1902 summer session at the University of California, but it was only after 1917 that library instruction evolved to what we know it to be today. The CLA had officially resolved as early as 1905, however, that

> the ‹Association› is deeply impressed with the need of a library training school for California. We hold it contrary to the declared policy of the state that any of her children should be forced to leave her borders to obtain any sort of useful knowledge. We affirm that our growing profession is worthy of recognition by the furnishing of systematic instruction.[14]

As Ray Held notes in his study of The Rise of the Public Library in California, ". . .there was only one complete and notable failure among the organized efforts of the early California Library Association. This was the campaign to secure the establishment of a. . .national copyright depository on the Pacific Coast."[15] The question first arose in 1897 when the Association resolved to lobby California's national representatives for the establishment of additional copyright depositories, including at least one on the Pacific Coast. A proposal growing from this meeting designated Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, and San Francisco as the proposed cities.[16]

However, an article in the Library Journal that same year held little hope for the proposal ever to become law; the newspaper press had labeled the idea "library robbery."[17] A progress report given in early 1898 acknowledged that librarians were either indifferent or hostile to the idea, and there was little chance of getting sufficient support throughout the country to secure passage.[18] And, indeed, the act was never passed.

One meeting each year was the annual CLA dinner meeting, often held at the California Hotel in San Francisco. The idea behind these meetings was less one of communicating new ideas in librarianship, and more one of having a good time, librarian-style, which usually meant a minimum of shop talk (if such a thing is possible among librarians), a modicum of entertainment, and a catered dinner with plenty of wine. For example, in January 1902, after a photographer had taken a "flash light picture of the members and their guests," the CLA membership sat

down to a meal consisting of: Eastern oysters in the half shell,
Consomme en tasse,
Riesling wine,
Ripe olives and salt almonds,
Shrimp salad with mayonnaise,
Broiled bass with parsley sauce,
Pommes Parisienne,
Filet of beef, larded, with green peas,
Romaine punch,
A claret wine,
Roast chicken with dressing,
Plombiere ice cream,
Assorted cakes, fruit, and cheeses, and
Cafe noir.

No indication is given of the cost of such a feast, either individually or totally, but a few years earlier, the total catering costs for a similar annual dinner came to $20.40, with $3.00 additional for rental of the piano.[19]

The story of the early CLA ends in 1906, a watershed year in California for a number of reasons. The San Francisco earthquake and fire greatly affected the development, through their destruction, of several library collections in San Francisco, and rendered many library buildings throughout Northern California unsafe. The bright spot in California's library picture was the appointment of James Gillis as President of the CLA. With his election a new era began in the history

of the Association, Gillis serving as President until his death in 1917. But in mobilizing and strengthening library interests after 1906, the California Library Association should remember it was standing on the shoulders of giants in the California library field—people who had conceived the CLA and its role, and had made it succeed during those first ten years of experimentation and growth.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Library Journal 17(January 1892): 25. A recent article on Kelso is: Evelyn Geller, "Tessa Kelso: unfinished hero of library herstory," American Libraries 6 (June 1975): 347.

[2]Constitution of the Library Association of Central California ([San Francisco: n.p., ca.1896]), section 2. The CLA was born as The Library Association of Central California, became the Library Association of California in 1898, when librarians from Southern California began joining the Association, and did not become the California Library Association in name until 1906. For the sake of clarity, however, the name CLA is used throughout the article, even though it was not made official until 1906.

[3]"Constitution, Bylaws, and Minutes, 1895-1906, of the Library Association of Central California" (Hereafter cited as "Record Book"), entry for October 17, 1896. This manuscript is the original record book of the CLA, and is now in the California Section of the California State Library, Sacramento.

[4]Ibid., entry for February 14, 1896.

[5]Celia A. Hayward, "Woman as cataloger," Public Libraries 3(April 1898): 123.

[6]"Record Book," entry for November 8, 1895.

[7]Ibid., entry for September 15, 1898.

[8]Ray E. Held, The Rise of the Public Library in California (Chicago: ALA, 1973), p. 107.

[9]"Record Book," entries for May 10, 1895; October 11, 1895; February 14, 1896. Held, Rise of the Public Library, 93.

[10]"Record Book," entries for October 10, 1902; April 18, 1903.

[11]Ibid., entry for May 10, 1895. Edwin H. Woodruff, "Fiction in public libraries," Library Journal 20(October 1895): 343.

[12]"Record Book," entry for March 13, 1896. Clement C. Young, "The public library and the public school," Library Journal 21(April 1896): 141.

[13]"Record Book," entry for April 9, 1897.

[14]Ibid., entry for October 21, 1905.

[15]Held, Rise of the Public Library, 92-3.

[16]"Record Book," entry for November 12, 1897.

[17]Library Journal 23(January 1898): 4.

[18]"Record Book," entry for March 11, 1898.

[19]Ibid., menu laid in following entry for January 17, 1902. Prices found in entry for January 14, 1898.